

IN AID OF WAR FUNDS

THE TWO TWICE BORN

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS



BY

A. C. KRISHNASWAMI B.A., B.L.



WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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PREFACE

A good play needs no preface. It is the consciousness of the shortcomings of the little drama that forces me to append a tiny preface to it. Even a careless perusal of the book will show that the book supplies no long-felt desideratum. My only aim has been to present some phases of the Hindu Society of to-day in its true colours. The book has nothing substantial in it to commend to the readers ; it may probably be interesting reading.

I am glad to acknowledge that Mr. H. O. D. Harding I.C.S. has laid me under a deep debt of gratitude in responding readily to writing an introduction to a book of such modest aims.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION

Through the kindness of many friends, at various times and places, it has been my privilege to witness Hindu dramas and I have always been struck with a kind of stereotyped likeness between them. You begin with a king on his throne made perhaps of a pile of old deal cases. He crosses his left leg on his right knee, does a half right turn, and listens to his minister's report of the affairs of state. The king and the minister sing together solos and duets for a time and the minister bows himself out to be succeeded by the senapathi or commander-in-chief. The king crosses his right leg on his left knee. The king and senapathi likewise sing solos and duets dealing with the people defeated in the past and to be defeated in the future. Exit senapathi, and enter queen or a dancing girl or some one. Then come arrangements for royal marriages: murders attempted or completed: escapes of young prince or princess: you see the prince in full court embroidery wandering in a painted forest armed with a tin sword—while tigers and huge snakes grin at him from every

bush : And so with comic interludes, wedding feasts, overfed Brahmins praising the king's cook, dacoits singing a merry air, "Va bandy" or some such thing. You work along through infinite singing to the death of some bad person and the wedding of the prince and the princess.

There are heaps of dramas like this and what always struck me was that like much of Shakespear, they deal only with kings and queens and I have often wondered why no modern Hindu ever wrote a modern comedy of ordinary people living ordinary lives. Probably many such dramas exist in Bombay and such big places : but play writing has not yet become one of the careers for literary young men and play goers still hear more of the doings of Rama and Sita than contemporary life. Play writing can be both interesting and lucrative, and may distribute a lot of pleasure among a lot of people.

I have therefore welcomed this maiden effort of young friend and hope that both for its purpose and its contents the public will join me in that welcome.

The TWO TWICE BORN deals with modern life-with ill assorted marriages where youth cannot be happy in the arms of age: with the natural and proper but almost hopeless longings of the virgin widow: with the pomposity and inanity that sometimes overtake aged and distinguished officials and with the maze of words without thoughts behind

them that are often noticeable at public meetings in this and other countries.

Act I introduces us to C. I. E. a retired Indian official of some dignity, who in his old age has married as second wife, a girl Lalita of the age of his widowed daughter Suguna. We see him and his friends discussing a public meeting to be held on social reform: and a little of the old man's futile fondling of his young wife: when you come to think about it what use is a young wife to an old man or he to her. Can a more monstrous coupling be imagined: Our C. I. E. is a reformer, but like many others his reform does not begin at home and ends when he leaves the presidential chair. Nevertheless he talks as though he would remarry his widowed daughter; regrets that he did not remarry an aged widow instead of the young girl, for whom he feels himself inadequate. We see the girls lamenting, one the absence of a husband and the natural joys of human living: the other the presence of a husband who is only one in name. And then off the whole party go to the Social reform meeting, Suguna dressed up to attract the eye of some widow marrier, Lalita in unattractive garb that she may not call forth any rival to C.I.E. This is somewhat a reversal of real life, where widows hide and married women make the most of their attractions, so far as clothes and jewellery can.

Act II gives us the public meeting whereat many words and little meaning are poured forth. Few

things perhaps are more wearisome and more dangerous than the gift of talking, if you have not really anything to say. If a man has a thing to say he can usually find words for it, as we saw the other day in a lecture by the first wounded officer to reach England and be able to address a recruit-meeting. Meantime Suguna has fallen in love with Sekhar, a young man of intelligence and Lalita with Visvanath, a young man to whom it was proposed to marry her before the old C. I. E. bought her up for Rs. 5,000. in hard cash.

Perhaps these things do not often happen in Hindu or any Society. Women do not usually make advances: but these girls are desperate: and each writes a letter to the man she loves suggesting a time and a place of meeting. Each gives the letter unknown to the other, to the servant for delivery, but without any written address: and each signs the other's name so that if the letter miscarries the reputation to suffer will be the other's, and not her own. I confess that at this point I lose all sympathy with the heroines. A girl may long for a husband, and may meet a man half way if she thinks he is the real man who will marry her, but that she should forge her friend's name, that if trouble comes it may fall on her friend and not on her is unthinkable: and what is more if the two men were attracted originally towards the two girls, when they found out their forgeries they must if they were decent men say that such girls

were not worth a further thought and not love them thereafter.

However our drama is built that way and the situation is full enough of humour. For the servant having Lalita's letter to give to Visvanath and Suguna's letter to give to Sekhar and neither being addressed naturally gives the letter to the wrong man in each case. And as each letter is signed wrong, each man gets what purports to be a letter from the lady of his heart fixing a place of meeting. On arrival there all impatience, each finds the wrong woman. The situation is delicious if only one could reconcile the girls' forgeries with their otherwise estimable characters.

In Act III we find C. I. E. and his brother Paunch, Sekhar, Visvanath and Prattle a verbose young person at a dinner party to Prattle on his appointment as Deputy Collector: C.I.E. who has somehow in his service picked up three lakhs and at the end of it a fair wife, gives Prattle the warnings of experience against money and women. Sekhar and Visvanath begin talking of their assignations and C. I. E. overhearing thinks his wife must have been the one Sekhar was after: at supper, husband and wife have a lively quarrel over this man whom the lady can in all honesty deny. Meantime Sekhar has found out the mistake of the letter and expressed his love to Suguna: she writes to him another impassioned letter in which she says that in marrying him he will really give her a second birth and for

this reason she proudly styles herself 'TWICE BORN.' She asks him to meet her at her house next day at 6-15, as her father will be out. To her in her new found happiness comes Lalita full of sorrows—wearied to death by her husband's suspicions and not quite sure whether she wants to become a widow or make her husband a second widower.

Enter Sekhar: and some talk of the marriage between him and Suguna. Charming as the girl is, one has a feeling that beauty adorned by one and a half lakhs of rupees is better in Sekhar's eyes than beauty unadorned. Certainly one and a half lakhs would hurt no one: and let us hope that he loves the woman also in spite of the money. C. I. E. returning unexpectedly interrupts this tete-a-tete: and thinking that Sekhar has come to see his wife, gives her such scolding and beating that she resolves that the well—the last refuge of many Hindu women—shall cover up her sorrows. It is rather typical of criminal work in this country that poor Lalita who really is guilty of wishing to replace her old husband by Visvanath her early love is convicted and punished on misunderstood evidence of making love to Sekhar, a charge which is entirely false. Lalita contemplating the well, sees Ganesh who always lives on the edge and abuses him for not giving her a happy life. So abusing she hurls him first into the well and poor Ganesh in drowning grants her prayer. For C. I. E. hearing the splash thinks his wife has thrown

herself into the well and comes running downstairs to save her. She has no time to drown herself and runs away. The poor old man slips and falls downstairs and so meets his end. Visvanath is a good fellow. For three years he has gone unmarried for love of Lalita: and the drama ends with the marriages in prospect of Suguna with Sekhar and Lalita with Visvanath—two educated intelligent grown up women and widows with the men of their choice.—

Our play is original and deals with vital problems: for the union of men and women is the foundation of Society. In India, people—children—marry first and love afterwards if they can. In England for the most part, people love first and because they love and therefore wish to pass their lives together, they marry. I do not say that in numerous Indian marriages love does not follow: or that in some English marriages love does not prove to be a vanishing emotion. But as an ideal I would say for all time for all peoples—marry because you love. Do not have to try and love because you are married.

With this beginning for a play writing career, I hope our author will go on and develop still further his powers of dialogue and humour and dramatic situations, and give us many more comedies of modern Indian life.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- C.I.E., *a retired gentleman*
RATTLE, *C.I.E.'s friend*
PAUNCH, *C.I.E.'s brother*
PRATTLE, *C.I.E.'s friend*
LALITA, *C.I.E.'s wife*
SUGUNA, *C.I.E.'s daughter*
SEKHAR, *C.I.E.'s sister's grandson*
VISVANATH, *C.I.E.'s friend*
NARAYAN, *Servant of Sekhar*
GOVIND, *Servant of Visvanath*
MANNAR, *Servant of C.I.E.*
SERVANT, *Do.*
 &c.; &c., &c.

Scene Samudrabud.

THE TWO TWICE BORN

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

ACT I. SCENE I

C. I. E's House : Drawing Room

C. I. E talking with his friends

RATTLE. How now! What about this evening's meeting you are to preside at?

C.I.E. Surely I do preside and the meeting must be convened.

RAT. That is precisely what I ask you about. Is everything ready?

C.I.E. Rings the bell: Enter servant.

C.I.E. Have you put up the posters in the prominent places I made mention of?

SER. Yes, Master, in all places prominent.

C.I.E. I suppose your idea of prominence did not content itself with the posters being put up in the street you live in. I am afraid you think you are the only prominent man in the world and your street the only prominent place.

SER. I am not ass enough to think so, your honour; I know that my master is a prominent person and I am proud of being a C.I.E's servant.

C.I.E. Hush, no flattery here, no Oriental flattery here. I had enough of western education to detect the Oriental flattery just as readily as thermometer the heat. Mind, you do not commit the same mistake again.

SER. Yes, your honour, not the *same* mistake.

C.I.E. Well, now, Mr. Rattle, we must look to other things. Have you informed our special friends, Mr. Visvanath and Mr. Sekhar, of this meeting?

RAT. Mr. Visvanath and Mr. Sekhar I just had the pleasure to inform on my way here. They told me that they would call upon you, Sir, presently.

C.I.E. Rings for the servant : to Mrs. C.I.E. behind a screen. Don't intrude here. I am engaged in talking to Mr. Rattle.

Mrs. C.I.E. *behind the screen.* I want you urgently for a minute :

SER. Sir, Master.

C.I.E. Mr. Rattle, please excuse me for a minute. I shall be coming presently. Just be occupied with reading the recent number of the 'Strand.

(Hands over the 'Strand' to him)

C.I.E. goes behind the screen; the servant following the master unnoticed by him.

C.I.E. to Mrs. C.I.E. My dearie, my Lalita, what may be that you want: a diamond or a cats eye?

Mrs. C.I.E. In the presence of others—you should not fawn upon me, my lord.

C.I.E. Perceiving the servant: Sirrah! begone, get thee away from me.

SER. You rang for me, Master.

C.I.E. You thrice sodden ass and confounded idiot! (and chases the servant into the drawing room).

Mr. Rattle to C.I.E. From the 'Strand', I understand that for fear of the suffragettes

the museum panes are fitted with triplex safety glasses, a recent invention.

C.I.E. It would be three centuries before our Pankhursts would make us use triplex safety glasses.

*C.I.E. Rings the bell and shouts 'Boy.
Enter servant.*

SER. Sir, Master.

C.I.E. Send the chairs to the Edward Memorial Hall the place of meeting, and deliver these letters of invitation. Quick up.

Exit servant.

RAT. Triplex safety glass is nothing but two layers of glass with a layer of celluloid between. Just look at this section of the triplex glass.

C.I.E. Just so. *Rings the bell.*

Enter another servant, Mannar.

MAN. Master.

C.I.E. Hand over this letter to Mr. Paunch, the Secretary of the Social Reform Association, and then run to the Edward Memorial Hall and look to the things being arranged well.

MAN. Yes, Master.

Exit bowing.

MAN. (*Entering again*) There are two gentlemen come, Mr. Visvanath and Mr. Sekhar, who want to see you.

C.I.E. Show them in at once.

Enter Messrs. Visvanath and Sekhar.

C.I.E. Welcome to you, gentlemen. How goes the world with you Mr. Visva and with you, Mr. Sekhar?

VIS. Well, pretty well, I should say.

C.I.E. I suppose both of you attend the meeting.

VIS. I shall.

SEK. The meeting, which meeting? Yes, the meeting of the Social Reform Association in the Edward Memorial Hall: I heard of it from Mr. Rattle. You have not given it enough publication. I am afraid you will have no audience, no meeting and everything will end in smoke.

C.I.E. You will see that it is a success, an unprecedented success. I assure you that at least ten good speeches will be made and Mr. Prattle's the best of them.

SEK. It remains to be seen.

VIS. You promise me so much that I should come prepared to see the whole

display of elocution. Who are they that are to entertain us?

C.I.E. A host of speakers, I assure you, Mr. Paunch the Secretary, Mr. Critic, Mr. Eloquent, Mr. Compromise, a lady speaker Mrs. Fairplay Ammal, yourself and myself.

RAT. It is getting late for me.

VIS. I do see by the clock that it is ten. Sekhar, Is that so? We shall all leave.

C.I.E. Good morning to you, gentlemen.

Exeunt Visva, Sekhar and Rattle.

ACT I. SCENE II

C. I. E. at his dinner—Mrs. C. I. E., and Suguna, widowed daughter of C. I. E. with him.

Mrs. C.I.E. My lord, I suppose the dinner is good; quite to your taste.

C.I.E. Anything that my young wife arranges for me must be as dainty as herself.

Mrs. C.I.E. You are mistaken; Suguna arranged everything.

SUG. The credit is all due to me.

C.I.E. It is good you please your old father: I am glad you get on well with your step mother.

Mrs. C.I.E. I treat her excellently. I love her more than I would if she were my own daughter.

SUG. Widowed as I am, I must accommodate myself to surroundings.

Mrs. C.I.E. You ungrateful

SUG. Excuse me, amma. I made a reference to my fate.

C.I.E. I pray, you don't talk of it again. My eyes are dim with tears. *Weeps.*

SUG. I may be happy again. In these days of social reform I may still have a chance.

C.I.E. Reform consists in speeches only. The double lives of our reformers you are aware of. Social conferences we have: Parishads and Panchayets! What reform have we effected? It is miserable to think of the difference between preaching and practice.

SUG. Yes, papa, only ten widow marriages have been performed and they too are among those who never talked of reform.

C.I.E. Quite right, my girl. Barking dogs seldom bite.

SUG. It seems as though God has given only a certain fixed quantity of energy to be spent in the direction of reform. Many exhaust the store by speech. Some usefully spend it in action.

Mrs. C.I.E. I hate all the rubbish of social reform. I am told that social reformers have been foolish enough to approach the Government with a bill for preventing unequal marriages between old men and young girls.

C.I.E. No such bill to the best of my knowledge. If it was so, *my* opinion should have been asked.

Mrs. C.I.E. Granting the bill is to be ushered in the council what will your opinion be? Against unequal marriages?

C.I.E. Ah, my dearie! Don't you know I will uphold unequal marriages. How could I, having married a young girl, give a different opinion?

Mrs. C.I.E. You may. Practice is different from preaching with social reformers to quote your own expression uttered a few minutes ago.

C.I.E. You to tell me that I may be inconsistent! I hate such remark. It is gall and wormwood to me. A little girl to pay me back in my own coin: to fling my expressions in my face! This is intolerable. If you had married a naughty boy he may relish such banter and you may fence with him endlessly. You amazon, you shall run to South America.

Mrs. C.I.E. My love, my lord, excuse me for a trivial fault of mine. I love you as I love my father. You have the very look of him, barring the scar in the forehead, caused by a nasty fall you had the other day. Would not a father excuse his penitent daughter? Ah! *Weeps.*

C.I.E. I understand not this! Who is it that weeps, my dear wife Lalita or my daughter Suguna? I heard an appeal to father and fatherly feelings. Yet I am sure there is no cause for Suguna to weep. Let me see without glasses. (*Removes his gold rimmed spectacles.*) It is worse. I see nothing (*Puts on glasses again.*) If it is Suguna that weeps I excuse her at once. Weep not, Suguna, a motherless child and

a widow, doubly deprived of a protector. If it be Lalita, I shall excuse her after a few minutes.

SUG. It is poor Lalita that weeps.

C.I.E. How am I to know which is which? You both are of the same stature and dress alike.

Mrs. C.I.E. I am glad you have forgiven me, my lord.

C.I.E. I have been sitting long over the dinner. Time passes swiftly with pleasant company.

ACT I. SCENE III

C.I.E. In his sitting room reading the report of the seventh Social Conference.

C.I.E. to himself:—Mrs. Fairplay seems to be a staunch adherent of widow remarriage; were she a male I would have no trouble in getting my daughter married to such an ardent advocate.

Enter servant.

SER. A gentleman come in a motor desires to see you, Sir.

C.I.E. Is he Raja Tej of Supra?

SER. I do not know, Sir.

C.I.E. Has he a velvet cap on, a gold mounted cane, a squint?

SER. I did not notice all that, but the car he came in is Arrol Johnston's car and bears the number 737.

C.I.E. It is he. Just go and tell him that I have gone out. *Exit servant.*

To himself:—He would force me to subscribe towards Hindu University and British Congress Committee. Legions of clubs and leagues do call upon me to subscribe. I wish I were not a C.I.E. Men presume that a C.I.E. is bound to contribute towards any foolish concern. C.I.E. is saddled with a heavy responsibility indeed.

Rings the bell.

MAN. Sir.

C.I.E. Have you arranged the chairs in the Hall?

MAN. Only my good luck saved me this day. I fell upon a chair, other chairs fell upon me by way of revenge. I broke some of them and they nearly broke me.

C.I.E. Excellent! Mannar, what is time now?

MAN. It is half past one, your honour.

C.I.E. Just tell me when it strikes two, and until then I shall be engaged here.

Exit Mannar.

To himself:—I have to prepare for the meeting this evening. (*Takes the seventh Social Conference Report and reads.*) Then he speaks to himself:—

It is now sixty years since the movement of the widow remarriage among the high caste Hindus was started; but those who have practised it are few. Not only on general principles that no restriction ought to be placed upon a woman's freedom of marriage that I do recommend the remarriage of widows. I do see that Hindu widows are directly or indirectly responsible for much of the immorality that prevails in Hindu Society: but for them I should say that immorality would almost be non-existent. I am personally interested in the widow remarriage reform. I have a widowed daughter whom I wish to see married. Further were widow remarriage in vogue, I would have married an aged widow instead of this young girl about whose fidelity I ever entertain serious doubts.

SER. Mr. Paunch has come, Sir.

C.I.E. Show him in at once. Don't you know he is my brother?

Enter Paunch.

PAU. Good morning, brother, I should not have disturbed you now in the heat of the day but for my having to consult you on an affair of great urgency.

C.I.E. Let your urgent affair rest a while. How are your children, your wife and the rest of the family?

PAU. Quite well: I do feel the heat of June so much. This time last year I was in Kodai. It is a lovely place.

C.I.E. Why do you swing your attache case to and fro? Give it some rest. Place it here on this table.

PAU. To pass on to my urgent affair.

C.I.E. Urgent and affair! Hang them. You must first listen to my urgent affair of the meeting this evening.

PAU. Mine is the very affair you refer to.

C.I.E. I have arranged everything; you will come here at fifteen to five: and we will both go together.

PAU. Yes, agreed. Listen to me. I am a practical reformer. Our Suguna is only a virgin widow and I think there can be no sane objection to a virgin widow being remarried.

C.I.E. How is a virgin widow in a better position?

PAU. I shall explain how she is. The objection to the remarriage of widows is based solely on the sentiment implanted nearly in all the minds of Hindus that a woman wedded and married to a man has rendered herself by such physical union incapable of surrendering her person to any other, be the person that married her living or dead. This explains the absence of divorce and the prohibition of remarriage of widows. The existence of this sentiment to this day is manifest in the movement of the remarriage of virgin widows not meeting with much opposition.

C.I.E. I understand your argument. But I would extend the freedom of remarriage to all widows : so much so that a widower of forty or fifty may be able to marry a woman of nearly his age (Aside and be

freed from the necessity of keeping watch over a young wife).

PAU. It may be wiser to lay down that widowers may marry widows; widowers and widows are much in the same boat. They both have been deprived of their partners. This measure would enable widowers to marry elderly ladies who could be housewives as well.

C.I.E. The widowers may not have the sentimental objection which bachelors have, to marry widows: I recognise that a measure of widowers marrying widows is more feasible and just.

PAU. Truce to such serious considerations now. It is late for me. I am your servant. *Exit.*

Clock strikes two

ACT I. SCENE IV

Suguna in her dressing room before the mirror.

Suguna to herself: Life is dull in a husbandless woman. I have to pass my life in sheer despondency: not a ray of hope to brighten my future. Though cut down by sorrow my form is beautiful (looking

herself in the mirror). Thinness adds to the grace : I waste my charms and wither away as a flower that is born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness in the desert air. I feel I have in me the charm to fascinate the best of men and yet why is not the exercise of such charm permitted ? What have I done to the society that it should cast upon me this ban ? I was but married when I was five and lost my husband at six. I have no knowledge of him that married me. Cruel fate ! (weeps) Has society the shadow of a right to inflict such punishment on me ? All this is due to the tyranny which the male sex exercises over the nobler, softer, and weaker one. *Enter Lalita.*

LAL. My dear Suguna, I just overheard all : I have my sorrows too and they are of the same nature. You are known to be a widow and stigmatised as such. But I occupy an anomalous position. I am as unlucky as you. Married, and unmarried am I. Can I be plainer still ?

SUG. You are decidedly in a better situation in having a protector. And you chose your lot.

LAL. The protector I have is yours too.

Enter C.I.E.

Suguna and Lalita pretend to be engaged in dressing their hair.

C.I.E. I am glad to see you thus engaged.

LAL. & SUG. We both dress our hair.

C.I.E. Suguna, I wish to take you to the meeting. There is a purpose in it. You will there have an opportunity of flashing your beauty upon some ardent radical social reformer who will be mad after you, and marry you in spite of the protest of the orthodox people. Pay attention to every little thing and you must appear to be a piece of painted Eve's flesh.

SUG. I take the hint, papa, and shall appear as beautiful as art can do.

C.I.E. to Lalita. Bewitching woman, you shall also go with me.

LAL. I have some scruples to appear in public and though not a pardanishin I would like staying at home. More so, as I have no such specific purpose as Suguna—

C.I.E. (Aside. You have a greater specific purpose at home. You have trafficking with some idle fellow). I can see thro' you.

You cant hoodwink me, I have not lived these sixty years in vain.

SUG. Do not disobey papa.

C.I.E. She dare to disobey me! You shall come, Lalita. Take care not to dress attractively. I will not leave you alone at home.

Exit C.I.E., in a passion

ACT I. SCENE V

C. I. E's. House.

Verandah. Boy waiting.

Mr. Paunch to servant. Is your Master ready? Has he dressed? Announce to him my arrival.

SER. Yes Sir,

Exit.

C.I.E. Good evening, Mr. Paunch; to servant, are the ladies ready?

SER. They are ready, your honour.

C.I.E. I bid them come out.

Enter Lalita and Suguna.

C.I.E. My carriage can accomodate two and yours two; We are four in all. How shall we dispose of the ladies?

PAU. Ladies in yours and gents in mine.

C.I.E. The ladies can't be left to themselves (*Aside* I must keep watch over Lalita. Otherwise a train of rascals will dog her heels).

PAU. Then the only solution is a gentleman and a lady in each carriage.

C.I.E. (*Aside*) I shant entrust Lalita to your care (*Aloud*) You shall take Suguna with you and that settles the matter.

ACT I. SCENE VI

Durbar street, C. I. E., and Mrs. C. I. E., in their Carriage. Paunch and Suguna in another carriage.

Mrs. C.I.E. This is Durbar street, my dear, and this leads direct to Edward Memorial Hall?

C.I.E. Yes.

Mr₅C.I.E. This black coat does not suit you, lovey, you don't look well in it. Indeed you don't.

C.I.E. Nonsense! it does not become a wife to dislike her husband in any dress whatsoever. (*Aside*) She puts on all this kindness as she suspects that I am jealous. All the kindness is to throw me off the

scent. I shan't fall an unsuspecting prey to the wiles of my beauteous enemy.

Mrs. C.I.E. To herself. It is for his estate that I sacrificed my happiness, my life.

A man in the street. What a hideous combination, an aged monster with a young girl, a beauty and a beast.

Mr. Visva passing. Good evening, Sir (*and bows twice*).

C.I.E. Good evening (*to himself*.) Why should he bow twice? The other bow is to Lalita. I saw them both exchange glances.

Suguna to Paunch. (*in the other carriage*):—Papa has gone much ahead of us :

PAU. That is his carriage. He is in sight.

Mr. Sekhar passing along the road greets Mr. Paunch.

SUG. Who is that that wished you good eve?

PAU. He is Mr. Sekhar, an ardent social reformer, though just a youth.

SUG. Hum! Is he so great as you make him!

ACT II SCENE I

Edward Memorial Hall.

Mr. C.I.E. in the chair. Messrs. Visvanath, Sekhar Prattle, Paunch and others present. Lalita and Suguna in the box.

C.I.E. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me immense pleasure to preside at such a function as this. It is an honour conferred upon me I take it. It is a rare pleasure to see such a large gathering as this. That a large number of us have taken the trouble to be present here to discuss the subject is proof, nay, an unmistakable proof that the subject we meet here to discuss is one of grave nature. It concerns us, our children and our children's children. Gentlemen I should not have referred to the subject even to this slight extent. It is for the speakers to come hereafter—to dwell upon the subject I have now trespassed upon the right of the speakers in alluding to the subject to discuss which we have met to day. I shall be content myself with the opportunity of a concluding speech that I as the president have. I now call upon Mr. Prattle to speak to us on social reform.

Mr. Prattle (*rises amidst loud applause*)
Ladies and gentlemen, I am now told by the president that each speaker should not take up more than ten minutes. I shall be as brief as I can possibly be. Gentlemen, I shall first talk about the necessity of reform. Amongst us there is unhappily a class of men who regard all deviation from the beaten track as something criminal and who are constitutionally incapable of thinking that any change can result in good. They say that deviation is an attribute of the child and that none but the children should indulge in it. They refer to the sun and the earth as examples they are to copy from. The sun rises day after day and sets at the close of each day. It indulges in no freak of deviation. The earth goes round itself and round the sun ceaselessly. They observe a uniform conduct. And why should we alone, they say the greatest of God's creation want changes reform and revolution. Such is their argument, Gentlemen, and could any one argue with such headstrong men ?

ALL. None, none.

PRA. (continues). Again there is a class of men who are more enlightened than the former—whom I have chosen to designate as headstrong and who concede that a change can result in bringing about a better state of affairs. Though they concede so much, they are not willing to admit that a change with respect to the machinery of the society can ever result in good. In as much as they do not concede that changes should ever be made with respect to society, we have to class them with the first set of people. Thirdly I can tell you of a class that perceives that there are evils in the social fabric of the Hindu society: but they are shocked at the mention of reform for they verily believe that the evils are of a nature which cannot be remedied. Let us forget for a while the existence of these people who form only a small portion of the Hindu community.

C.I.E. I allotted only 10 minutes, Mr. Prattle, to each speaker.

PRA. (continues) Forgetting for a while the existence of this microscopic minority, the rest of us are agreed that our present

society built under different environments is not at the present day quite suited to the present needs and requirements. It must be said to the credit of the early founders of our society that it has stood four square to all the winds that blew: It is only now that it exhibits signs of its weakness and old age. Is not this tower of society, built long long ago, to be repaired? Are we by our inaction to allow it to crumble into ruins? (cries of no, no). Are we still to be swayed by the love we bear to our old customs and traditions that we should not realise our situation? We have long tolerated the evils, the obstacles in the way of our progress: and we have paid enough penalty for our past neglect. This is what I wish to lay stress upon: that is that we must change our customs so as to suit the time (*resumes his seat*).

LISTENER I. It is all prattling: he deserves the name.

LIS. II. He has but touched the fringe of the subject.

LIS. I. He has not prescribed a cure or pointed out a single defect.

LIS. II. He was speaking for a long time and has said nothing.

Mr. Sekhar. Ladies and gentlemen:—

For centuries we have been led astray from the path of duty. It is high time for us to start the campaign of setting aright our society. As long as we were isolated from other nations, locked up on three sides by sea and on the north by the mountain, our deterioration, we were not able to perceive. The contact with the west has painfully shewn us what a deep and a precipitous fall that we have had. So long were we unaware of our downward descent. Shall we still pursue our downward course or begin to make the ascent is the question now to be solved. (*A voice. You shall descend from the platform soon*). Gentlemen the question, the burning topic of the day is this. Is it not a right vested in posterity that our children shall claim from us that the society shall be left in, at least, as good a state as when we took charge of it? Do we discharge our duty, our religious duties our social duties and our moral obligations to our posterity, if we persist in our

downward descent deeper still. Is not a father morally blamed at any rate when he wastes the ancestral estate and leaves it poorer than when he inherited it? Having thus attempted to demonstrate the need of social reform, let me pass further: It is a fortunate thing that we have not lacked persons who preach loudly on the platforms: but alas! what a misfortune that none of them have turned out practical reformers. The person that vociferates most about the condemnation of Purdah and the reasonableness of the widow remarriage has usually no son or daughter. It turns out on most occasions that he who loudly earnestly proposes the introduction of post puberty marriages among women is already married.

I accuse these reformers of leading double lives. These are not the reformers that we are in need of. With these few words let me resume my seat.

Mr. Compromise. Ladies and gentlemen:—

In my humble opinion, Ladies and gentlemen it is cruel to accuse the reformers of leading double lives, of their conduct being

inconsistent with their preachings. The reformers form their convictions and they freely express them. If they are unable to convert their convictions into action, they are not to blame. This may look paradoxical: yet it is perfectly true. An ardent social reformer upholds post puberty marriages. If the rest of the people, marry their daughters early, whom could he marry in order to carry out his convictions. Thus we see that we are to blame for not extending the co-operation which he rightly expects at our hands. This proves to us clearly that reformers in themselves can effect nothing good without the co-operation of the rest of the society. Therefore the pronouncement of the views of the social reformers is to be interpreted as indications of their determination to follow the lines chalked by them on condition of their being backed up by the rest. Again do I reiterate that a reformer in himself can do nothing. I realise this and therefore do I welcome each reformer: each proselyte of the new creed of reform is to be hailed for the same reason: and should we not realise

that in the number lies our success. So let us not accuse them of double lives or insincerity, but sympathise with them for the way in which they seek to solve the social problems. Each social reformer, my term includes also the lip reformers, ought to be able to influence the circle of his friends and his acquaintances. His influence though unseen may also be exerted unknown to him, I mean, unconsciously. So even the lip reformers do us some service. Of late, there have been parishads and marriage reform leagues. These have been mistakenly condemned by some as congregations of lip reformers. We want more Parishads and more Marriage Reform leagues. The Parishads and the Marriage Reform leagues have their own functions to do. The opinions of organised bodies such as Parishads and Social Reform Associations have their own utilitarian value. Gentlemen, my ten minutes is past and I resume my seat.

LIS I. There is some sense in what he says.

LIS II. Better than his predecessors, I dare say.

VIS. President, Ladies and gentlemen:—Enough has been said on the necessity of reform that I do not mean to harp on the same string. It remains for me only to spot out certain sores in the integument of the society and prescribe certain salves for it. Gentlemen, you will concede that the environment of our society is different from what it was years ago *i.e.*, that it has changed. It is therefore necessary that we should ~~make~~ certain alterations in the structure ~~of~~ our society. Unfortunately for us, as fate will have, there is a class of people who instead of adjusting the machinery of the society to the altered conditions, would fain attempt at doing the impossible *i.e.*, attempt at changing the environments. They with a fond veneration for antiquity want a reversion to the state of things that prevailed in days gone by. Let me dismiss this suggestion with a condemnation that it is impractical. The first of the evils which requires our immediate attention is the seclusion to which we have subjected our women (looking at Lalita). Socondly following in its wake is

the total want of education. I next pass on to the marriage system, about the imperfections of which a volume may be written. Our girls are made to love whom they have married instead of their marrying those they love. Nextly we have cruelly consigned child widows to single life. These are but a few of the very many evils. Find a solution for all these. That is my earnest prayer to you.

LIS. I. He beat the record. He is the best of the speakers we had this day.

LIS. II. Such a good head on young shoulders. He has given us a succinct precis.

C.I.E. Ladies and gentlemen:—

I have but a little to tell you by way of a concluding speech. The lecturers who had the privilege to address you have so thoroughly dealt with the subject and have left hardly nothing for me. I should thank them for the exhaustive treatment the subject had at their hands. I mean to add only a few words. Being taken for granted that reform is necessary the next question that springs up is whether the reform is to

be brought about by one sporadic effort? An ardent lover of social reform enamoured of the ways of the west would propose the total abolition of the caste system, the remarriage of the widows, the divorce at mutual consent, the demolition of the time honoured purdah, and other reforms to be brought about all at once. Gentlemen permit me to tell you that any successful attempt at introducing social reforms depends on the observance of certain rules or principles of action. Only such reforms as are salutary are to be introduced. In other words, interference with existing customs is justifiable only when it appears that the present customs are obnoxious, and that adherence to such customs tells upon the society injuriously. Reform and not revolution should be our watch word. An attempt to set right all the evils at *one* stride may be wrought with dangerous consequences. Are we in eagerness, to burn away the existing fabric of society, in order to obtain the desired ends speedily? Who can guarantee that out of its ashes shall rise like the mysterious Phoenix of

the east, in fuller and fairer form, a new society adapted to the present day needs.

PAU. Before bringing the proceedings of this meeting to a close I have but a small duty to discharge. I need not tell you in very many words what it is. It is easy to infer what it ought to be: If there existed any duty in this world which is pleasant to discharge, it is this one which I am about to do. If at all there is a duty which discharges itself while mentioning what it is, it is the one I have in hand. Gentlemen I am asked to propose a hearty vote of thanks to the chair.

C.I.E. I call upon Mr. Paunch to give three cheers for the King Emperor.

PAU. Hip! hip! hurrah!

ALL. Hip! hip! hurrah!

C.I.E. *Standing.* And three more for the success of British arms against Kaiser.

ALL. Hip! hip! hurrah!

ACT II SCENE II

C.I.E.'s House: Suguna in her chamber reading Conan Doyle's 'Poison Belt.'

SUG. *to herself.* Every living thing in this world is happy save me alas; (*reads*

the book) I wish I pass through the poison belt of ether which Conan Doyle says killed all the people on that portion of the earth which the poison belt then encircled (*rings the bell*).

MAN. (*Outside the chamber*) Madam.

SUG. Come in. (*Mannar enters.*)

SUG. Look and attend carefully to what I say.

MAN. I am all ears, madam.

SUG. I want you to do me a little service for which you will be amply rewarded; I want to take you into confidence and let me even now tell you that a betrayal of the trust I impose in you, may mean serious consequences.

MAN. *Nods his head signifying assent.*

SUG. (*Continues*) I shall now give you a letter which you will deliver to a gentleman whose name I shall now give out and to none else. Do you understand me?

MAN. I understand I am to carry a letter and post it.

SUG. You idiot, you deserve to be drowned in the gulf of your name.

MAN. I did not exactly comprehend what your ladyship told me.

SUG. You are to deliver a letter to a gentleman I shall presently name.

MAN. I now understand

SUG. Wait outside and come in when I ring for you, to receive the letter.

Exit Mannar bowing.

SUG. (Alone). Sekhar is my father's sister's grandson. How shall I address him. 'Dear Sir' will quite serve the purpose. Is my honour safe in the hands of such a man? Am I right in intrusting it with him? Any how writing is the only course open to me. I must let Sekhar know of my love to him. I must commit it to writing. Yes, a thought strikes me a way out of the impasse. Papa is suspicious of Lalita's character and in my letter to Sekhar I shall sign 'Lalita.' In case of disclosure Lalita shall suffer (*takes her pen and writes*)

SAMUDRABAD,

20—9—1914.

Dear Sir,

This afternoon, the old gentleman goes out to attend the District Conference. I

wish to have a talk with you. Need I say more? Meet me in the drawing room this evening at six.

LALITA

SUG. Folds this carefully, puts it in an envelope and rings the bell.

Enter Mannar.

SUG. Hand this to Mr. Sekhar. Will you?

MAN. There is no superscription, madam.

SUG. It is purposely omitted. You will post it if it bore the address.

Mannar puts the letter into his right pocket of the coat and Exit.

ACT II SCENE III

LAL. *In her chamber reading to herself from a book* 'What is there in life: what joys, what transports, which flow not from the spring of love. The birth of love is the birth of happiness, nay, even of life. To breathe without it is to drag on a dull phlegmatic insipid being and struggle imperfect in the womb of nature.' I can't bring myself to love my old husband.

Enter C.I.E.

C.I.E. My lark, my sweet song bird.

LAL. I am longing for you: you have come yourself (*falls in into his open arms*).

C.I.E. To hold, to embrace, my dear Lalita effaces all my care.

Lalita moves away from him towards the mirror.

C.I.E. It is rude of you to part from me thus.

LAL. (God rid me of this bore. *Aside moving to C.I.E.* I wanted to adjust my hair and appear more lovely in your eyes.

C.I.E. My angel, your beauteous form ever appears in my mind.

LAL. So does yours in mine. You are continually present in my thoughts (*Aside. A woman thinks more often of the person she loathes than the one she loves*).

C.I.E. How much I yearn for such expressions of love from you. *Draws near and imprints a kiss or two on her cheeks.*

LAL. *Tears away from him:* to herself This grisly bear to kiss me.

C.I.E. To himself in a whisper. I see all her love is feigned. She dreads my touch as though I were a krait. No more shall I put any trust in women. I make

up my mind now, never more to care a fittle, an iota, for my *dear* Lalita, accursed Lalita. Did I say dear? My tongue be cut in twain for calling her 'dear,' Alas she is as cold as alabaster and elusive beyond comparison.

C.I.E. departs.

LAL. Who would deliver me from the dragon of my husband? How different should I be if I had married Visvanath, as it was first proposed! Can not Visvanath deliver me from this evil? Chivalry is dead in India. Here, more than elsewhere, it is true that hanging and wiving go by destiny. Now do I realise what Destiny can do. Why should I not seek to defy it though bound to fail? Visvanath had once promised that he would do me any service I demanded of him. Why should I not permit him to deliver me from this evil. (*Opens the drawers and takes out her fountain pen*) I shall write to my Visvanath and he may be able to find a way out of difficulty. Though I have much faith in him I shall not commit a folly by signing my name. I shall forge Suguna's signature so that in case the letter

is misdelivered the reputations to be damaged will be Suguna's. Further such an act is a venial offence in a widow.

SAMUDRABAD,

20—9—1914.

My dear sir,

I long to see you. I therefore desire you to come here. Walk straight into the alcove of our garden, where I shall be waiting for you. Precisely at six this evening.

SUGUNA

Lalita rings the bell and shouts Mannar, Mannar.

Enter Mannar.

MAN. Madam

LAL. Do me a favour and you will be remembered for ever. Take this letter and deliver it to *(folds the letter, puts it in an envelope and starts to write the superscription)* Mannar interrupting, no address need be written on it, madam: if it bore the address I would be tempted to post it.

LAL. Then, deliver it to Mr. Visvanath, 68, car street.

Exit Mannar

ACT II. SCENE IV

68, Car Street, Samudrabad.

MAN. to Govind. Is your master within. I have a letter for him

GOV. The letter give: Me give him.

MAN. Conduct me to him. I was asked to give it in person to him only.

GOV. Come, come.

Mannar is conducted to the interior of the house.

VIS. to Mannar. What do you want?

MAN. I am C.I.E.'s servant and have a letter for you, Sir. Amma gave it to me to be given to you, master.

VIS. Out with it quickly (*in an impatient and menacing attitude*).

MAN. *Confused dives into his right pocket, pulls out a letter and delivers it to him.*
Here, sir.

VIS. *Reads the letter.* Ye you may go
(gives a half rupee to Mannar)

ACT II SCENE V

Peacock Gardens, Samudrabad.

MAN. to NAR. Is your master at home?

NAR. What have you to do with my master

MAN. I want to see him: a letter for him
(Narayan conducts Mannar to his master,
and Mannar hands over the letter).

SEK. Who gave the letter? (opening the envelope and pulling out the tiny note)

MAN. Madam gave it.

SEK. Yes, I do understand all: Were you asked to bring an answer?

MAN. No, Sir.

SEK. (throws a half rupee into his joined palms).

Exit Mannar.

SEK. I am to see Suguna this eve at six. Summer house in the garden is the place. How lucky should I be to get a note from Suguna (kisses the letter and then puts it into the pocket of the coat he is to wear in the evening).

ACT II SCENE VI

C.I.E.'s Drawing room and Suguna in it awaiting the arrival of Sekhar.

SUG. The hour is drawing near when Sekhar must be present here. Mannar must

have delivered the letter. True the letter is written in Lalita's name. Lalita he does not know and he must have the sense to know that one he does not know will not write to him such a letter; and what is more, would he not have the sense to infer that I wrote it though I distorted my hand to make it look like Lalita's. My Sekhar is shrewd: he would divine all this and more. Of what avail will his shrewdness be, if the letter was not delivered to him (*Rings the bell and shouts Mannar Mannar*). How is it that Mannar that does not appear. Maybe he has not delivered the letter; it is 5.45. now.

MAN. Did you want me, madam?

SUG. I rang for you; I shouted Mannar Mannar and where were you all along?

MAN. I was in the alcove of our garden; Lalita bid me carry a chair thither.

SUG. Did you give the letter to Mr. Sekhar?

MAN. Yes, madam and he gave me a half rupee for it

(Showing her a half rupee).

SUG. Did you tell him who it was that sent the letter ?

MAN. I told him that madam gave it.

SUG. You told him that I gave it. Well, hurry up to the railway station and post this letter. The letter is for my brother in England (*she hands over the letter and Mannar leaves hurriedly*).

SUG. I have contrived to keep Mannar away from the house : and Lalita is out in the garden and what a splendid opportunity! Nothing wanting save Sekhar : It is only five minutes to six and Sekhar has not come (*she adjusts her hair ; composes her features ; the clock chimes six*).

SUG. It is six and he has not come. Lo! I hear the sound of some one coming : It must be he. The sound draws nearer and the footsteps fall quicker

SUG. (*to the gentleman still out of sight*) Isn't it you, my dear—

VIS. (*still out of sight*) Even so. Visva-nath presents himself before Suguna : *sees her : looks perplexed and withdraws a step or two :*

SUG. What may be that you want, How dare you intrude—

VIS. I promised to call upon the old gentleman at an earlier hour and I was unavoidably prevented by circumstances over which I had no control from being punctual and I may tell you that I am Mr—

SUG. I am not prepared to listen to your lecture; nor does it concern me to know who you are. The old gentleman is not at home.

Exit Visvanath.

SUG. When I expected my Sekhar here comes a fellow with a hang dog look: I gave him a thrashing and he went away like a beaten dog with its head hung down (*throws herself on a sofa disconsolate*) Sekhar must have known all; I can't understand his not coming; probably he has not the spirit to venture a visit. I am a young widow and his reputation is also involved in such a visit as the one I contemplated. Maybe that he, like the cat in the adage, would fain eat fish without wetting its feet.

ACT II SCENE VII

C.I.E.'S garden and Lalita seated in a chair.

LAL. I did err in marrying the old gentleman; foolish of me to have married him for the sake of his estate. When one takes an estate he should take the live stock on it too. So it was with me. I am much vexed to perceive the Hindu system of marriage. Great atrocities are perpetrated in the name of Social Custom. Girls are married to men fit to be their grand parents. Why should not such a custom be put down by the strong hand of law? The honourable members of our Legislative Council take no note of these. I have learnt from the old gentleman that the law annuls all contracts without consideration. In fairness so should it annul all marriages unsupported by love; if the theory of law does not annul marriage without love, I for one, can say that such marriages are in practice annulled (*takes out her watch and reads the time*). It is 5.45 and still no sign of Visvanath. It is he that I wanted to marry and I would have married him but

for the intervention of the old man : but how is it that Visvanath has not yet come ? Mannar told me that he gave it to him and that he had told him that the letter was sent him by the madam, by madam meaning me. He is sure to come ; I think I am madly in love with him. I must appear to be calm cool and collected. I must first gauge him. (*Removes the chair which was facing south towards the pathway leading to the alcove and places the chair so as to face north and sits in it with assumed ease*) I hear the footsteps of some one coming ; it must be he. I shall not turn round to see if it is he.

SEK. (*advances*) Is that you, my dear.—

Lalita turns round : sees a stranger ; looks confused ;

SEK. *Retreats some paces ;* I did not mean to scare you out of your seat. I thought I saw the old gentleman seated in the chair yonder. I am afraid I am mistaken.

LAL. It was rude of you to intrude on my privacy thus.

SEK. I beg to be excused for an offence unwittingly committed.

ACT III SCENE I

Mr. Paunch's house: Messrs. Sekhar and Visvanath seated at a table: Mr. Paunch, Mr. Prattle and C. I. E. seated at another close by.

Prattle to Paunch. I have to thank you for the excellent dinner you have given us all.

PAU. I got up this feast in honour of you—on your appointment as Deputy Collector Bezwada.

C.I.E. Well, young man, I owe to you this nice dinner. You are on the eve of entering the Government service and you may find it worth while to seek advice from one who has grown grey with service. I have to tell you two things which you will do well to keep in mind. Cultivate a contempt for money and women if already you have it not and I assure you your success is had.

PRA. I have no partiality for either.

C.I.E. Partiality is a different matter you must cultivate contempt, genuine contempt for both; one is as bad as the other.

SEK. (*At the other table chewing*) Pan-supari does aid easy digestion.

C.I.E. Will you please pass on the box of perfumed nut. (C.I.E. draws his chair to Sekhar's table.)

(A comet appears in the sky).

VIS. Look at the meteorite. How it ascends the heaven.

SEK. This meteorite is but a trifling one compared to the one ever present in the firmament of my mind.

VIS. I understand you not.

SEK. I refer to the beautiful lady I am enamoured of—The young lady that sat in the front box on the day of the Social Reform meeting.

VIS. Your reference to your lady love puts me in mind of my own.

SEK. It seems to be certain that I can't have her. There is an impassable barrier between. An assignation with her in the alcove of her garden was arranged and—

C.I.E. Wont you entertain me with your talk? why in such undertone.

SEK. I ask pardon; this is dull entertainment to you, sir.

C.I.E. Far from it. I beg I may not be thought inquisitive if I ask whether the lady was short or tall.

SEK. Short.

C.I.E. (Then I am safe. Aside) But perhaps some people think her tall.

SEK. I know several who think her so.

C.I.E. (May be it is she) Was she a brown or a fair lady?

SEK. Brown.

C.I.E. Of a subdued bronze hue?

SEK. Ye-es. yes.

C.I.E. Had she a rose sari on : a diamond nose screw?

SEK. Yes, yes.

C.I.E. (I am undone. Aside) What may be her name.

SEK. That I will not disclose.

C.I.E. (It is she. Aside) Good bye to you all.

PAU. Good night.

ACT III SCENE II

C.I.E.'S house. Mannar helping C.I.E. to undress.

C.I.E. Did Lalita go out anywhere this evening?

MAN. No.

C.I.E. Nor yesterday ?

MAN. No, sir.

C.I.E. Sirrah, not to the alcove in the garden.

MAN. Yes, master, for a few minutes to while away her time.

C.I.E. Did she arrange to meet a gentleman there ?

MAN. No, sir, not to my knowledge.

C.I.E. You , liar (*advances to beat him*).

MAN. (*retreating*). Lalita bade me carry a chair to the alcove though there was one already and this is all I know. I saw no gentleman there in the alcove and thereafter I was sent to the Railway Station to post a letter.

C.I.E. She sent you on the errand.

MAN. No, master. Suguna sent me.

C.I.E. Get away (*advances to kick him*).

Exit servant.

C.I.E. *Lies on a couch and contemplates*
There is positive evidence of it. Sekhar spoke of his assignation in the alcove. Mannar tells me that a chair was carried there. It was for Sekhar. I see it all. She

is a wicked woman. I can't brook more I will be revenged upon her. She shall die by my hand.

ACT III SCENE III

C.I.E. and Mrs. C.I.E. at supper.

C.I.E. The meal is well prepared and it is excellent. Do you expect any guest?

LAL. I do not understand the question.

C.I.E. You will not understand, I know. I shall be plain. Have you asked any gentlemen to dine?

LAL. No, none.

C.I.E. Sure, quite sure are you? Don't you intend to sup with another in the alcove yonder.

LAL. (*taken aback*), I don't comprehend this.

C.I.E. Have you not called Sekhar to sup with you?

LAL. (*resuming composure*) Sekhar. Who is he?

C.I.E. Your beloved—

LAL. I know no one of that name.

C.I.E. You have learnt the art of simulation to perfection: meet Sekhar in the

alcove, have a tete-tete with him, profess love for him in my absence and yet know him not! (*slaps her in the cheek*).

LAL. I once again say that I know not Sekhar. I am a virtuous woman and I need hardly add that I seldom gave you reason for doubting my love for you.

C.I.E. No, not at all. I am not jealous of you, my dear (*with a sardonic smile*).

LAL. (*incensed*) you have shewn yourself to be jealous causelessly.

C.I.E. In faith, I am not jealous of Mr. Sekhar.

LAL. Who is that Sekhar? A name invented to taunt me with?

C.I.E. Though he is a pretty man and agreeable company in the evenings.

LAL. (*In a defiant attitude*). Such a man I should really like to see. You will introduce him to me to-morrow; Wont you invite him to-morrow for dinner?

C.I.E. Why should I invite him for dinner when you can meet him out in the garden?

LAL. I don't understand your base groundless suspicion. This maltreatment

I can't bear at your hands for long. The whole world is sensible how unworthy you are of a woman of my virtue. My God Ganesa will surely relieve me from this strait ere long.

C.I.E. Is Ganesa another gallant of yours or have you nicknamed Sekhar as Ganesh?

ACT III. SCENE IV

C.I.E.'s house. Suguna in the backyard of the same seated near the well on the parapet wall of which sits a stone image of Ganesha.

SUG. *reading to herself a letter.*

My dear Sekhar,—I thank you for the kind note of yours. Have you been in love with me so long? Why did you not inform of it earlier? Why did you not place it at your lady's (my) shrine earlier? Then you could have spared all the languishment you have undergone. I am so sorry for you, my angel.

In response to your suggestion of marrying me I have but to state that it is in perfect accordance with my wishes. Why entertain a doubt if your love will be acceptable to me. It is for your love I have

been pining for these six months. My guardian angel, let this letter set your mind at rest.

Yes. There may be an "impassable barrier" in the way. Our society is not so much advanced as to recognise the validity of widow remarriages. Anyhow my father's consent may be procured, and with his concurrence I hope you will deliver me from the serfdom of singleness. You will but be bestowing a new life to one who is merely having a dull lifeless existence. It is a second birth that I am to have on my marriage. I proudly style myself as *twice born* in view of my second birth.

Meet me to-morrow evening at 6-15 in my house. The rest in person.

SAMUDRABAD, }
1st October 1914. }

YOUR SUGUNA.

SUG. Ay, Boy (*and claps her hands*).

SER. *Hurrying fast*. Yes, madam.

SUG. Do deliver this in person to Mr. Sekhar and to none else. Delivery of it to some other would mean serious consequences. You will be amply rewarded in the fullness of time if all goes well.

SER. Yes, madam, (*bowing*).

SUG. Execute the work I give you and you will not see the end of my gratitude.

SER. Nor the beginning of it either. Amma, do me the favour of putting in a word in the proper time to have my pay raised from ten to eleven. I expect a Dipavali present from you.

SUG. (This privileged old fellow brow-beats even my father. He is in possession of some secrets which the world should not know and he can not be chucked out of service. *Aside*). When is the feast?

SER. Tuesday next. Must I bring an answer?

SUG. Yes, if you are given one.

(*Exit Servant*).

SUG. Papa told me and Lalita that he would be absent from home to-morrow evening between six and eight. 6-15 is the hour fixed by me to meet Sekhar.

Enter Lalita.

Lalita sits dejected: Then with her head between her knees weeps.

SUG. Why should tears fall so fast from your eyes? What is that that rends your heart?

LAL. My heart is full to the brim with Sorrow.

SUG. Lalita, do but open your mind to me. Tell me what aches your heart. What makes your head droop with sorrow? Cant you confide in me? Wont you look upon me as your sister?

LAL. I have nothing to tell you but that I have resolved to commit suicide. The matters have come to such a pass.

SUG. I cant really believe this. You, to commit suicide. I who should have done so, do still live. There can be nothing more foolish in the world as your resolution to commit suicide. Tell me what has made you determine upon such a course now more than ever.

LAL. What is the use of telling you all that. I cant bear this life burdened with care. A woman of my virtue discretion and prudence should be eternally tormented with the suspicions of a jealous husband. Oh! I cant proceed (*weeps*).

SUG. I shall teach you a method by which you can quiet them. You know that jealousy is a disease bred up in the bones with some men. He is so made and nothing can alter my father's nature and you have only to tactfully manage him. One has merely to flatter one's husband, praise his features and pay him compliments in order to bridle his jealousy.

LAL. That may be as you say. I haven't the art to do all that. If my virtue be not seen clearly I can't set a foil to it. Instead of satisfying his groundless fears I am even prompted to do, by way of spite, acts calculated to rouse the dormant jealousy. Such is my spirit.

SUG. Then it will all the more exasperate him. You draw his revenge upon you. Isn't it your fault totally.

LAL. Don't preach your maxims to me. If you had a husband you will know that the green eyed monster of Jealousy is. I wish I am a widow. The widowhood confers the height of liberty a woman can have under the existing system of man-made laws. I wish I am emancipated. Suguna,

excuse me. I have said things which I should not have told you. They escaped my lips.

SUG. Poor soul! weep not so bitterly. Resolve not to die. Better days may dawn. There is hope still.

LAL. I have lost all hope. I thought the all-powerful Ganesha seated on the parapet of the well yonder would work a turn in my affairs. I prayed to him all these *tén* days. No avail. I fondly believed he would work a favourable change in the attitude of my husband towards me. The matters have drifted from bad to worse. Even Ganesa has disappointed me.

SUG. I see somebody coming here and it is better we move into the house.

ACT III. SCENE V

C.I.E's. house. Sekhar in the drawing room.

SEK. Oh! here, she comes.

SUG. You are punctual to the appointment.

SEK. Yes, precise to the minute (*takes out his watch*) it is 6-15. When do you expect your father back?

SUG. He said he will be here at eight.

SEK. So we have an hour and forty-five minutes at our disposal. In your letter you suggest your marriage with me. If your father wont permit the marriage, you have to embrace the faith of Brahmo Samaj.

SUG. Marry we will and if necessary we will both become Samajists.

SEK. Would your father disinherit you if you change your faith? He by his will leaves you one half of his estate that is about three lakhs of rupees.

SUG. Is it for the estate that you wish to marry me? Is all your love to be traced to lucre?

SEK. Oh! no, it is a matter of no consideration. It is you that I want. Your face is a fortune (*draws and approaches to kiss her*).

SUG. (*Shrinks back*) I am afraid you think otherwise of the assignation than it was meant.

SEK. We have agreed to marry each other. You are mine by marriage and there can be no offence in—(*Approaches to embrace her*).

SUG. O! heavens. You will not abuse the confidence I have placed in you. If you offer anything rude I will alarm the house.

SEK. I beg your pardon, madam. It is only 6-30 now and I hear the carriage coming.

SUG. Yes, it is my father's carriage. I know it (*flies upstairs to her room*).

SEK. *Walks out of the drawing room and meets C.I.E. near the portico.*

C.I.E. (Gruffly) Who is this (*and looking straight at Sekhar.*) Are you a burglar and what do you loiter here for?

SEK. I just came in sir to see you about—

C.I.E. I cant see you now. I am not at home to you. You shall never darken my doors again (*Sekhar takes to his heels*).

SCENE CHANGES

C.I.E. *Hurries upstairs knocking each step of the staircase with his heavy walking stick.*

C.I.E. To Lalita in her room. Why did that man come here?

LAL. Who, my lord?

C.I.E. You, vile rascal (gives her a blow with the stick). You wish to know who.

LAL. I do neither understand the question nor the reason of the undeserved punishment.

C.I.E. You vile strumpet that bestows her favour to men other than her husband (raises the stick and gives her two blows on her head).

LAL. That is a baseless imputation.

C.I.E. I saw the rake Sekhar now down at the portico and why does he prowl about here except at your behest?

LAL. My lord, I entreat you to listen to me patiently. I state on oath that I know of no one, by name, Sekhar. Nor do I encourage any lover answering to the description you gave me the other day. I have been loyal to you and the punishment which I am receiving from your hands is unmerited.

C.I.E. You would make me not believe my own eyes. I saw Sekhar just now in the portico.

LAL. Granting that were true, how does it mean an offence on my part.

C.I.E. What further proofs you want me to produce to prove your treachery? You have disgraced me in the eyes of the world. The revengeful spirit rises in me I shall make you rue for all this. I shall marry another wife and make you her slave. You shall be supplanted and trodden upon by her.

LAL. It may be in your power to falsely accuse me but it does not rest with you to punish me to a further extent. I am already resolved to die, to commit suicide by drowning myself in the well. No amount of pleading will satisfy you and could any virtuous woman endure your treatment! Alas! my dear lord, will you reconsider my case and acquit me? Wont you decide that I am innocent? (*Falls at his feet*).

C.I.E. What is there to reconsider. I know the truth and you are guilty.

LAL. Oh! Ganesha help me. To C.I.E. I bid you farewell.

SCENE CHANGES

LAL. *Goes down the stairs : before the well she stands and mutters to herself.*

Cursed the star under which I was born ;
accursed is the hour of my nativity. Life is
not worth living : it is all a play as sages say.
My life ceases this moment. I pass on to
a second one where I hope I may fare
better. Oh Ganesh (*addressing the image
on the well*). I had much faith in you and
you have belied the trust just as the mor-
tals in this Kali Yuga do. With me you
shall get to the bottom of the well. You
deserve no longer to be on this pedestal
(*pushes the image of Ganesa into the well*).

LAL. To the world beyond I go. (*Looking
around*). This is the last view of the Earth
I take. Mother earth farewell. Farewell
to you, moon crescent and to your com-
panion Rohini just outside your nether tip,
and to you numerous stars. I hear some-
body call Lalita, Lalita, from the house. It
is my husband. Why does he shriek with
pain (*and runs into the house*).

SCENE CHANGES

C.I.E. Could she be innocent ? Rather
she is. Otherwise she could not have
looked like innocence insulted. What is

that I have seen after all? It may be that Sekhar has deliberately lied (hears the sound of Ganesha falling into the well). Oh Lalita Lalita you have fallen into the well. Let me try to save you (*rushes down the stairs; slips; rolls down the staircase; shrieks with pain; becomes unconscious*).

ACT III. SCENE VI

Lalita and Visvanath in the alcove.

LAL. Let us continue friends, friends only.

VIS. And forget your assent to marry me made three years ago, a week previous to your marriage with your deceased husband and also forget that we were ever lovers.

LAL. No, never can I forget *that*. But let those memories of the past be buried deep in our souls like the treasures our ancestors buried in safe and unsuspected spots. We *know* our treasures exist and that knowledge must be the *only* satisfaction we can hope to have. My honour, my duty as a Hindu widow prevents the—

VIS. Nor would I wean you from the path of duty in order to place you in a position that would turn your pride into shame. Nevertheless ere we take leave of this subject, perhaps for ever, let me enjoy the momentary satisfaction of assuring you Lalita, that I have remained unmarried simply because I never never would prove a renegade to those vows and oaths which three years ago I pledged to you.

LAL. Why do you allude to those days of dear memories? (*shedding tears*).

VIS. Compose yourself, I pray you.

LAL. Wherefore did I yield to the persuasions of others, to the command of a father, to the entreaties of a mother who in a body conspired against our happiness, and marketed me for a full five thousand.

VIS. If you were not sacrificed for the family exigencies but allowed your choice.

LAL. There is no use crying over spilt milk. It was so written by destiny and in obedience to the dictates of fate the circumstances took such an unhappy turn and my happiness was spoilt for all time to come.

VIS. Fate has only stayed it for three years and has atoned for its past freaks. And why should not you—

LAL. I know what you wish to say— For years past, ever since the day I became his wife, have I struggled to remain faithful to my duty as his wife and reputation as a woman although the memory of you hung round my soul. Unchaste thoughts sometimes entered my mind; even, at times, I prayed delivery from the hands of my husband and counted upon you as my deliverer. A different feeling has somehow seized hold of me after his death and to keep his name unsullied I shall not marry again. Further these marriages, are not recognised and our progeny would be stigmatised as 'widow's children'. Oh, it is impossible.

VIS. No, no, that must not be so. Grant me the boon I ask you. Full three years have I cherished love for you. If you but see within my heart you will not perceive the fleshy heart that rhythmically pulsates: but in it you will see a clear image of your beloved self with your Visvanath kneeling

before it. I once again entreat you to grant me the boon. I pray you do not refuse it. If ~~my~~ innermost recesses of ~~the~~ heart were laid bare, it would resemble the disintombed city of the Vesuvian lava. Do not ruthlessly inflict untold misery on one who lives and lived only for you.

LAL. Nor is my passion for you the less, I assure you. The cruel custom prohibits what we both yearn for. I do not refuse your request, be it understood. We shall talk over the matter some other time.

ACT III. SCENE VII

Mr. Paunch's house : Drawing room : Mr. Paunch and Suguna.

PAU. The marriage is settled : the day fixed : and the invitations issued out. I take the place of my brother and I give you the formal consent to the marriage.

SUG. How much happier should I be, if my father lived now to see me married.

PAU. Could you like Savitri summon a dead person from the other world. Accept the services of this substitute.

SUG. I am much indebted to you my dear uncle ; I am glad to tell you that my

example may be followed by another, and Lalita is inclined to marry again.

PAU. Has she been brought to her senses? I advised her to do so, a fortnight ago; but she expressed an absolute disinclination. Whom has she chosen to marry?

SUG. She has not definitely made up her mind about her re-marriage. It must be Visvanath if she marries.

PAU. Excellent thing! He is such a nice chap I know. Her choice has not fallen amiss. Her marriage may also be performed the same day *i.e.*, Friday after next.

ACT III. SCENE VIII

Lalita and Visvanath in the alcove at sunset.

VIS. Really, Lalita, you grow handsomer every day. You do infinite credit to my taste. Indeed you do.

LAL. If I please you, you know, that is all I wish: but if, if—

VIS. If what, my dear.

LAL. If ever you should get tired of me.

VIS. Have I not sworn to love you for

ever and have I not told you over and over again that I do love you much? Haven't you faith in me?

LAL. Yes, yes I have. If I hadn't would I agree to marry you (*distant peal of thunder*). There is a strange darkness gathering round us. Look at the clouds, the dark clouds.

VIS. True, the clouds seem gathering for only a light shower and let us go farther amongst those trees. (*Lalita and ~~Visvanath~~ walk some distance*) lightning flashes: A tremendous clap of thunder.

VIS. Dear Lalita, fear nothing. The storm is passing over. Don't you hear the storm sounds more distant with each peal.

LAL. Terrible, terrible. If the lightning had struck you! I shudder at the thought.

VIS. Cheer up, cheer up. We shall run into the house.

Another thunder

LAL. Save me, save me Visvanath. (*embraces him and clings to him*) Only death shall separate us.

Thunder passes off